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For R U/S Hughes from Ambassador
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SUBJECT: Favorable Views of U.S. surge upward in Arab/Muslim
Morocco. What Went Right?

Ref: 2004 Rabat 2171

Summary

¶1. The Pew Global Attitudes Project survey published in July 2005 recorded a startling 22-point increase in favorable attitudes toward the United States among Moroccans. 49 percent of Moroccans held favorable views of the U.S., compared to only 27 percent in each of the two prior years. Morocco had the most favorable views of the U.S. of any predominantly Muslim country, and is the only such country in the Pew study where favorable views of the U.S. outnumber unfavorable views (49 percent favorable versus 45 percent unfavorable). In the 18-34 age group, a majority of Moroccans-53 percent-reported positive views of the U.S. The percentage of Moroccans viewing the U.S. favorably was greater than that in traditional U.S. allies including France, Germany, Spain and the Netherlands.

¶2. Although the Embassy views such survey results with healthy skepticism, even if the reality is less dramatic than the survey suggests, a combination of factors in Morocco appears to be having a positive impact on public attitudes toward the U.S. The Embassy has analyzed Moroccan views of the U.S. (including via the use of focus groups in the year prior to the 2005 survey) to try to better identify factors that may be having a positive impact.

¶3. Our conclusion is that some improvement may have resulted from external events, and that domestic improvement most likely resulted not only from public diplomacy efforts per se, but from a multi-faceted government and non-government engagement with Morocco that has de-emphasized policy differences between Morocco and the U.S. and projected our countries as equal partners, in trade, in promoting democracy, in military relations, and in direct interaction between cities and individuals. Outreach efforts buttressed by a media plan to bring the Ambassador and Mission personnel in direct contact with Moroccans throughout the country may also have played a role.

¶4. We also believe that cultural engagement with Morocco, aimed at a youth audience that appreciates American people and their way of life, has been an important, positive factor. Radio Sawa, the number one station in Morocco, appears to be having a major impact. Rapid, visible American response to humanitarian disasters has also helped. U.S. engagement in conflict resolution may also have a positive impact subsequent to the survey; U.S. facilitation of the release of the 404 remaining Moroccan prisoners of war held by the Polisario has generated an outpouring of goodwill toward the U.S.

¶5. Based on this review, the Embassy in the coming year will:

--expand cultural diplomacy and outreach to youth through American performing artists, including via participation in cultural festivals and sports exchanges;

--support public and private U.S.-Morocco partnership, especially via the Chicago-Casablanca sister city program and similar private initiatives, the Peace Corps, support for Moroccan democratic reforms, and by publicly aligning the U.S. Millennium Challenge Account with Morocco's Human Development Initiative;

--continue extensive nationwide public outreach via travel of the Ambassador and other Mission personnel, establishing at least four American corners, opening an American Presence Post in Marrakech, and regular programming in Dar America;

--provide diplomatic support for the continued operation and expansion of Radio Sawa;

--persist in providing and publicizing U.S. humanitarian relief via military and other programs;

--keep listening to and learning from those whom we are

trying to reach.

16. The most important support we could receive from the Department to achieve these goals would be additional staff (two additional officers for our public diplomacy section to support American Corners, media outreach, and expanded cultural programming, and an officer to staff an American Presence Post), and expanded funding for cultural exchanges, especially to bring more American performing artists and other cultural envoys to Morocco.

End summary.

What Happened and Did It Really?

17. A Pew Global Attitudes Report published on July 14, 2005 provided startling news: Favorable views of the United States among Moroccan citizens, according to the report, had surged upward by 22 points during the previous 12 months. Whereas only 27 percent of Moroccans had viewed the U.S. favorably in the March 2004 and May 2003 Pew surveys, 49 percent of Moroccans surveyed held a favorable view of the U.S. in the survey conducted in June 2005.

18. A closer look at the number brought more welcome news. Favorable views of the U.S. outnumbered unfavorable views, 49 percent to 44 percent, the only predominantly Muslim country where that is the case. Moreover, favorable views of the U.S. were strongest among the young. Among the 18-34 age group, a majority (53 percent) viewed the U.S. favorably. Among Moroccans age 35 and older, 45 percent viewed the U.S. favorably. Favorable views of Morocco were proportionately greater than in countries traditionally allied with the U.S. including France, Germany, Spain and the Netherlands.

19. Those who live in the desert learn to suspect that any vision of an oasis may be a mirage. In this vein, our Mission must assess the survey with healthy skepticism and careful acknowledgement of what we know and do not know about the results. The Pew Global Attitudes Project is conducted and published by a nonpartisan research organization in the U.S., and is co-chaired by former Secretary Madeline Albright and former U.S. Senator John C.

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Danforth. Data collection in Morocco was carried out by the Pan Arab Research Center, which conducted face to face interviews with adults 18 years and older from June 6 to 16 2005.

10. The 1000 survey respondents were disproportionately drawn from urban areas, and the study reports a margin of error of three percent. We do not know whether the result is sustainable, what the trend line looks like, whether it is currently moving up or down, whether the result represented a "spike," or what factors specifically influenced the views of the respondents. But we do think it is credible that attitudes toward the US are softening, and that our own efforts to reach and connect with a broader cross-section on non-elites are having positive results.

First, We Listened

11. Embassy Rabat first took notice of the Pew survey in March 2004, when the survey found not only that Moroccans held strongly negative views of the United States, but more troubling, that a strong majority of Moroccans opposed the U.S. led war on terror, and that 45 percent held favorable views of Osama bin Laden. The findings did not square with our observations of Moroccans--especially young people--coming together in the aftermath of the Casablanca terrorist bombings to oppose terrorism, a commitment brought to life by a nationwide "Don't Touch My Country" campaign carried out by a youth group network with support from the Moroccan government.

12. To better understand the 2004 results, the Embassy commissioned two focus groups to further explore Moroccan attitudes toward the U.S. and terrorism (reftel). One group was composed of young, poor and poorly educated men age 18-25 from slum districts--a demographic deliberately designed to resemble that of the young people who carried out the Casablanca terrorist bombings. A second group was drawn from the middle and upper-middle income classes and had high school or higher levels of education. The local office of the National Democratic Institute conducted the focus groups in Rabat in May 2004. The participants had contact only with Moroccan interviewers, and had no knowledge of U.S. sponsorship of the study.

13. Via these focus groups, the Embassy learned that even poorly educated urban Moroccans had some knowledge of U.S.

foreign policy, although they tended to ascribe negative motives to U.S. goals. The focus group study also confirmed what has been stated elsewhere—that like their counterparts throughout the Arab world, young Moroccan men strongly disapproved of U.S. policy and action in the Middle East, but admired the American people and their way of life. Focus group participants strongly condemned terrorism, and viewed poverty, ignorance and lack of education as factors that rendered young Moroccans susceptible to recruitment by extremists. The focus group participants linked the U.S. to violent acts directed against Palestinians.

¶14. Moroccans' positive views of U.S. lifestyle and economic opportunity are also reflected in the record number of Moroccans who have won the annual diversity visa lottery, with 3083 winners in 2003 and 5069 in 2004. 347,000 Moroccans applied for the diversity visa lottery in 2004 and 443,000 have applied in 2005. For many young Moroccans who would have responded to the Pew poll, the U.S. symbolizes hope for a better life. In fact, one of the focus group participants told us, "Everyone dreams of winning the (visa) lottery to go to the U.S."

Accentuate the Positive

¶15. The Embassy country team used the Pew survey and focus group findings as the basis for a September 2004 off-site review of public diplomacy objectives. Our conclusion was to recognize but minimize in terms of public diplomacy the concentration on our differences concerning policy in the Middle East, and to try to capitalize upon those facets of American life that Moroccans admired, emphasizing cultural and educational engagement with non-elite, especially young Moroccans. By emphasizing what Moroccans like about U.S. society (educational opportunity, pop culture, sports, youth exchange programs, economic opportunity), we hoped to nurture positive impressions. The Embassy adopted an increase in favorable views of the U.S. as a performance measure in our Mission Program Plan.

¶16. To our knowledge, there have been no formal studies on market penetration for radio and television audiences in Morocco. It is generally recognized among media contacts that most Moroccans get their information first from the radio, followed by television and print media. Satellite dishes are widely used in Morocco, and the Government does not impede reception of foreign broadcasts. The most watched and respected news media are almost certainly Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiyah. No reliable statistics on print media readership available, but newspapers and magazines are believed to reach a very small percentage of the total population, in part due to extremely high illiteracy rates.

Showing Up - With Reporters

¶17. During the period in which favorable attitudes toward the U.S. increased, the Mission conducted two major nationwide outreach efforts, in addition to travel and public diplomacy conducted by the Ambassador and mission officers throughout the year.

¶18. The first such effort occurred in August 2004, when the Ambassador took advantage of the traditional August lull in Rabat to travel to remote areas of Morocco. Over a period of four weeks, the Ambassador and other Mission officers traveled to the cities of Oujda, Nador, Al Hoceima, Marrakech, Agadir and remote rural areas to emphasize U.S. partnership with Morocco. Visiting Peace Corps sites, AID projects, local government officials and civic and business organizations, the outreach visits visibly demonstrated U.S. interest in Morocco beyond Rabat and Casablanca.

¶19. A media plan was developed for each visit, and reporters from national media were invited and assisted to come along on the trips, resulting in extensive and favorable national media coverage. Interviews for local reporters were also arranged at each stop. Anecdotal feedback highlighted Moroccans' appreciation for the Ambassador's interest in what was happening throughout the country. Visits to many other locations continued throughout the year.

¶20. By a large margin, the topic that resulted in the most news coverage during the twelve-month period was the U.S.-Morocco Free Trade Agreement (FTA). There had been a steady significant stream of negative press coverage leading up to and immediately following the conclusion of negotiations in March 2004, with the media focused on the risks to Morocco posed by the agreement. However, the tide turned decisively toward positive coverage of what both countries stood to gain from the agreement after the Embassy launched a major outreach program, the "FTA Caravan," in September 2004.

121. The caravan was a road show in which the Ambassador, Embassy officers, experts from the U.S., and Moroccan government officials participated. Caravan participants interacted directly with students, businesspeople and workers throughout Morocco, and generated 76 positive news articles on the FTA, as well as significant nightly television coverage of caravan events. In a series of cities throughout Morocco, the group held business round tables, met with students and journalists, toured factory floors, answered questions and distributed information packages in French and Arabic to explain the benefits of the agreement. By providing seats on the bus to a national television crew and a journalist from the Moroccan national news agency, the Embassy ensured daily media coverage of this six-day information blitz.

Partnership, Not Paternalism

122. Formal public diplomacy activities were only one portion of what may have influenced an increase in favorable attitudes toward the U.S. In fact, Mission public affairs functions experienced significant staffing gaps during the year, and some projects, including Mission plans to launch American Corners in Morocco, progressed more slowly than desired. Instead, opinions of the U.S. appear to have been influenced through a broad range of factors with a unifying theme: partnership.

123. The Free Trade Agreement negotiation illustrated this theme as did other initiatives: American-Moroccan co-chairmanship of the first Forum for the Future, the U.S. decision to designate Morocco as a Major Non-NATO Ally, and the restoration of the Peace Corps program.

124. After the FTA, The Forum for the Future was the second most heavily reported U.S. related news story during the twelve-month period. Although initial media reaction to prematurely leaked U.S. proposals for supporting democratic reform in the region were very negative, of 44 news items the Embassy collected by the time of the Forum itself, a large majority were generally positive. Embassy believes this result was due in part to media outreach by the Ambassador and other Embassy officers, and the Moroccan government.

125. The Major Non-NATO Ally designation was reinforced in the media by positive coverage of Moroccan participation in large scale U.S. and NATO naval exercises, and by coverage of U.S. military humanitarian assistance projects throughout the country.

126. Another vital partnership initiative has been the resumption of the Peace Corps program in Morocco, one of only two such programs in the Middle East/North Africa region. After a security-driven suspension prior to the Iraq War, the Peace Corps was restored its full program of more than 140 volunteers in rural areas of Morocco. Although the Mission does not publicize volunteers' locations or specific activities, the work of the Peace Corps is well known by word of mouth, and the impact is nearly universally favorable.

Private Partnership and Sister Cities

125. The single most successful non-Federal government activity projecting Morocco and the U.S. as equal partners with common interests has been the Chicago-Casablanca sister city program, which received crucial support from the Mission and appears to be among the most successful sister-city relationships in the world.

126. Private sector resources were used to bring a variety of organizations and individuals from the two cities closer together through professional, educational and cultural exchanges. High schools in both cities were paired, professionals in the areas of urban planning and medicine traded expertise, Chicago brought American basketball trainers to Morocco, and elected officials, students and academics traded visits with the goal of sharing solutions for common problems. Under Sister City auspices, Chicago opticians provided eye examination clinics and eyeglasses for Casablanca's poor.

127. Moroccan television and print media coverage of the Chicago-Casablanca sister cities program has been abundant and consistently positive. One particular program that sparked high media interest and saw both flags flying over the signing ceremony in Casablanca's main square was "CASA-BASKET" a ten-year basketball training program co-sponsored by the U.S. sports organization "One on One Basketball," and launched in December 2004. Each year CASA-BASKET will teach basketball to 900 children from Casablanca's poorest

neighborhoods.

128. Moroccan print press sports pages, probably the most-read pages of any newspaper by young Moroccan males, carried photos of the program launch for several days following the signing. Similarly, Chicago's South Shore Drill Team gave seven performances to an estimated 60,000 Moroccans in three cities, and "jammed" with young Moroccans from Casablanca's impoverished neighborhood schools.

129. The activities of private American charities operating in Morocco, such as Operation Smile and Bridge to Morocco, appeared regularly in the Moroccan media in 2004. A State Department-assisted private sector effort that was widely praised by the Moroccan press, civil society associations and individual beneficiaries was the Wheelchair Foundation, which donated over 600 wheelchairs for poor Moroccans between July 2004 and July 2005.

130. American generosity was an antidote to damaging stories that appeared in the Moroccan press 2004/2005, such as the Abu Ghraib prison scandal. Editorial comment in Moroccan media, particularly print media, noted that the sort of humanitarian activity exemplified by the Wheelchair Foundation provided an image of America completely different from the perceived negative images related to Iraq.

Impact of Radio Sawa and Al Hurra Television

131. For many reasons, including a high illiteracy rate, most Moroccans get their information from radio and television. Radio Sawa, launched in Morocco in August 2003, rapidly became the most popular radio station in Morocco. According to the latest ACNielsen surveys, 53% of 15-29 year old Moroccans in the broadcast area tune in every week. 59% of Radio Sawa listeners said that its news was reliable, and 74% said Radio Sawa was one of their top news sources. Many Moroccan news articles, and Mission employees, have noted Radio Sawa's omnipresence in Moroccan taxis and cafes.

132. Contributing to the rise in Radio Sawa's popularity in Morocco during the twelve-month period was Sawa's expansion during 2004. Under an agreement with the Moroccan government, the International Board of Broadcasters installed transmitters in five new cities between April and August 2004, for a total of seven transmitters throughout Morocco. In addition, Radio Sawa introduced a Morocco-specific stream with news reports and "Sawa Chat" comments in the Moroccan dialect.

133. The attraction of American pop music that Radio Sawa broadcasts and the use of "neutral" vocabulary in its Arabic language news broadcasts may be making headway in changing perceptions of the U.S. among its many Moroccan listeners. The broadcast sector in Morocco is undergoing liberalization. There are currently only three other radio stations. The test of Radio Sawa's staying power may be its market-share after other stations, including European competitors, begin broadcasting, which is likely to occur in early 2006.

134. While most Moroccans prefer to watch satellite television for entertainment, and Al Jazeera in particular for 24/7 Arabic news coverage, the Alhurra satellite network funded by the U.S. Congress has made some headway since beginning broadcasting in 2004. In the latest ACNielsen survey, 27% of adults (over age 15) surveyed said they watched Alhurra at least once a week, and 70% of those said its news is reliable.

Rapid U.S. Disaster Response

134. Although they prefer to watch satellite television stations, Moroccan viewers still tune in to the two state-run television stations for local and national news. Embassy Rabat was featured on both stations and in the print media in a positive light for U.S. rapid response to two humanitarian crises in Morocco: the Al Hoceima earthquake and the locust invasion. The earthquake occurred before the twelve-month period under review, but the Embassy's timely humanitarian response (ahead of almost any other country, including the EU) was well remembered and highlighted by the Ambassador's follow-up visit to Al Hoceima in August 2004 (and again in July 2005) where he and his wife were given extensive media coverage working alongside a group of American volunteers rebuilding damaged homes. In addition, the U.S. was the only country to contribute on a bilateral basis to combating last year's locust infestation, garnering wide, favorable media coverage.

Expanding Cultural Diplomacy

135. --

MMission Morocco has an unusual public diplomacy asset that undoubtedly contributed to Moroccans' favorable views of the U.S.: "Dar America" in Casablanca, one of the last remaining U.S. cultural centers in the Arab world. Dar America continues to attract more than 20,000 students every year to its many activities. The October 2003 Report by the Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy for the Arab and Muslim World (the "Djerejian Report"), whose members visited Morocco in August 2003, including the Casablanca slums that produced the suicide bombers, singled Dar America out for its contribution to public diplomacy, and called for expanded use of cultural diplomacy to influence attitudes toward the United States.

136. It is impossible to know whether U.S. Embassy/Dar America youth programs actually touched directly any of those surveyed by Pew in 2004. However, among other steps taken consistent with the Advisory Group's recommendations, the Embassy doubled the number of Moroccans sent on exchange programs (including International Visitor, Voluntary Visitor, MEPI Youth Leadership, P4L programs and other educational/press exchange programs), and expanded in 2003 and 2004 participation in Foreign Press Center-sponsored press reporting tours to the U.S.

137. In addition to continuing diverse cultural programming in 2004/05, including a well-received Jazz Ambassador's program, the Embassy added several highly successful cultural events targeting a younger audience that may have had some influence on young Moroccans' perceptions of the U.S. For example, in March 2004, one of New York City's finest modern dance troupes, the Battery Dance Company (BDC), performed twice to packed theaters in Rabat and Casablanca, winding up the Rabat show with several dozen Moroccan teens joining the BDC dancers on stage for a spontaneous hip-hop performance. The Embassy estimates that the trendy artists directly reached 2,700 Moroccans through their live performances and 13 dance workshops. Extensive television coverage of the performances amplified this program's positive effects on an estimated television audience of up to 30 million viewers. The dance company received 18 favorable newspaper articles.

138. As part of our effort to expand cultural diplomacy, we targeted Moroccan cultural festivals that garner particularly good media coverage. More importantly, participation of U.S. artists in cultural festivals throughout the country, like the travel of Mission officials to remote areas, conveys U.S. respect for Moroccan culture. U.S. performing artists-some U.S. government sponsored and some not-participated in cultural festivals in Rabat, Casablanca, Asilah, Fez, and Marrakech during 2004.

139. Country-Folk duo Bob and Tucker Livingston, who played at the 2004 Asilah cultural festival and a youth festival in Mohammedia, reached an audience of 60,000 in Mohammedia, north of Casablanca, in August 2004. In February 2005, the Basketball Cultural Envoys reached approximately 2,250 young sports fans and generated a spike in positive media coverage for the Mission. The May 2005 Embassy-sponsored "I Love Hip Hop in Morocco" tour directly reached an estimated 36,000 young Moroccans via performances in three cities and also received extraordinarily upbeat media coverage. A privately organized American Christian rock festival in Marrakech in May 2005 drew an estimated 100,000 concert goers over three days.

Help From Friends

140. Less easy to measure, or even define, are characteristics particular to Morocco that could be shaping attitudes toward the U.S. Easily the most influential individual in Morocco is the popular reform-minded King Mohammed VI, who has guided the country toward economic, political and social liberalization since inheriting the throne in 1999. Through his public statements, the King has contributed to the general view that government-to-government bilateral relations with the U.S.-including the King's visit to the White House in July 2004--are excellent and the "trickle down" effect of this view, regularly projected by state-run television and print media, cannot be discounted. According to some Embassy contacts, the U.S. is perceived as "behind" the democratic reforms in Morocco because the U.S. government, from President Bush down, has lauded them frequently, and U.S. support for democratic reform is perceived as having a positive influence on Morocco's future.

The Way Ahead

141. Over the coming year, the Embassy will continue efforts to identify strategies that build upon the strengths of the U.S. image in Morocco, and direct resources to support those strategies. We will continue to actively target youth with programs that emphasize what Moroccans most like about the U.S. This means utilizing American performing artists to expand cultural diplomacy (especially through U.S. participation in Moroccan cultural festivals). It also means seeking opportunities to highlight U.S. partnership with Morocco via the Chicago-Casablanca sister city program, the Peace Corps, public outreach by the Ambassador and other Mission personnel, the establishment of at least four American corners, and the opening of an American Presence Post in Marrakech as forecast in our Mission Program Plan.

142. The dramatic and highly publicized August release of the remaining Moroccan 404 Prisoners of War held by the Polisario in July generated extensive favorable coverage of the U.S. role in facilitating the release. The event prompted spontaneous phone calls and letters of appreciation to the Embassy, and may have been among the most significant public diplomacy accomplishments of the Mission in years.

143. Morocco's eligibility for Millennium Challenge Account funding will provide another opportunity to focus on partnership, especially as the Moroccan government seeks to align the Millennium Challenge Account with King Mohammed's Human Development Initiative.

144. As Morocco's broadcast sector undergoes liberalization, the Embassy will continue to provide diplomatic support for the operation of Radio Sawa, to ensure the station's continued viability and support its market expansion.

145. Department support to sustain the apparent improvement in favorable attitudes toward the United States is critical. In post's estimation, the most important resources that Washington could provide are people. The Mission has been severely understaffed for the past two years, partly as a result of Department need for personnel in places like Libya, Afghanistan and Iraq. For extended periods, public staffing country wide has hovered near 50 percent. To maintain and sustain favorable attitudes toward the United States, the resource we most need is reinforced Mission staffing. Our highest priorities in this regard would be two additional officers for public diplomacy to support media operations, expanded cultural programming, and implementation of American corners. In addition, a generalist officer to staff an American Presence Post in Marrakech is needed. The position the Mission had previously identified for this function has instead been required on a nearly full time basis to manage programs to support reforms in Morocco and the Broader Middle East and North Africa region, including MEPI and other regional initiatives.

146. Finally, and most importantly, as we move ahead we will continue to listen and learn. The Ambassador and Mission officers will continue to engage in dialogue with Moroccans throughout the country, highlight these efforts by engaging the participation of the media, and demonstrate U.S. concern and interest in the process. The Embassy intends to conduct additional focus groups to try to better understand what influences Moroccan views of the United States. We believe that by obtaining and acting upon this knowledge, we will be better able to support U.S. national objectives. Riley